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In the Wake of the Event

In 2012, the British-Canadian novelist Rachel Cusk published a memoir entitled *Aftermath*, the third volume in her genre-bending collection of auto/biographical writings which started with *A Life's Work: On Becoming a Mother* in 2001, and continued with *The Last Supper: A Summer in Italy* – her take on the *Italienische Reise* – released in 2012. Subtitled *On Marriage and Separation*, *Aftermath* was published not only in the aftermath of an unprecedentedly hostile reaction to her previous auto/biographical narratives (see Kusek 2017: 149), but also in the aftermath of the writer's separation from her husband.

The notion of aftermath, this consequence of an event whose nature is unfortunate and disastrous, remains the book's central metaphor. In principle, *Aftermath* is vitally concerned with the notion of after-effects, with what happens when "the gears of life [go] into the reverse" (Cusk 2013: 2) and, consequently, provides its readers with a documentation of the "disorder," "fragmentation," and "impermanence" (26, 94) that are brought about by a traumatic event. A sense of loss is, perhaps, best illustrated by Cusk being forced to extract one of her teeth which – much like her marriage – is diagnosed as being "beyond repair" (29). The writer's concern with what happens to "the world of the mouth" when its integral part becomes removed, "what happens when the tooth is gone" (31–32), is tantamount to her apprehension regarding one's condition in the wake of an ordeal. In short, Cusk acknowledges the fact that the new principle of her life is that of "chaos" and "brokenness" (2); that her new situation is a regression and not progress; that her marriage was synonymous with civilisation and that now "the barbarians are cavorting in the ruins" (122). "I no longer have a life," she says. "It's an afterlife; it's all aftermath" (91).

However, as early as in the first chapter of her memoir, Cusk introduces another meaning of aftermath: the idea of "second mowing" – "a second

crop of grass that is sown and reaped after the harvest is in" (5) – which she borrows from her history teacher, Mrs. Lewis. She recalls the teacher's particular fondness for post-Roman, early Saxon Britain, for the "new reality" and "the aftermath of that megalomaniacal all-conquering unity" that was guaranteed by the Roman Empire (ibid.). The period marked by the absence of the "great administrator civilisation" – be it the Romans or Offa of Mercia – as well as "diffusity" and a lack of a central "driving, unifying force" (with its masculine overtones) was what Mrs. Lewis enthused about (3–4). According to Mrs. Lewis,

> [this] darkness and disorganisation were not mere negation, mere absence. They were both aftermath and prelude. [...] Civilisation, order, meaning, belief: there were no sunlit peaks to be reached by a steady climb. They were built and then they fell, were built and fell away again or were destroyed. The darkness, the disorganisation that succeeded them had their own existence, their own integrity: were betrothed to civilisation, as sleep is betrothed to activity. In the life of compartments lies the possibility of unity, just as unity contains the prospect of atomisation. Better, in Mrs. Lewis's view, to live the compartmentalised, disorganised life and feel the dark strings of creativity than to dwell in civilised unity, racked by the impulse to destroy. (5)

Mrs. Lewis's teachings are certainly recalled to serve as words of consolation for the grieving subject/wife-no-more, and offer some kind of optimism and larger historiosophical perspective about the gains of the aftermath. Such a reading would – while acknowledging disastrous or catastrophic consequence of the event – argue in favour of recognising some rejuvenating potential (or "integrity") of the above-mentioned "darkness" and "disorganisation" which appear to be inextricably linked to the idea of aftermath.

This unorthodox approach, which attempts to resist unequivocally disastrous and unfortunate consequences of events – or such interpretation of their nature – has encouraged us – via this very book – to re-visit the notion and representation of aftermath, understood here widely as a consequence, result, or after-effect of a seminal event (to an individual, a community, society, regions or nations), and to explore its transformative and life-changing characteristics – especially in the light of Mrs. Lewis's pronouncements. Some of the questions that we have decided to pose (and hopefully answer) – a joint activity which has brought together twenty-three scholars from eleven countries representing a variety of academic disciplines – are the following: What happens in the

wake of the event – this surprising and unanticipated *arrivant*, as Jacques Derrida would call it; this "unexpected, unforeseeable arrival" of something or someone whose "*visitation* […] is such an irruption that [one] is not prepared to receive [it or them]" (Derrida 2007a: 451; emphasis in original). Is the event's aftermath always characterised by the experience of disorder, fragmentation, and impermanence; by – to use Cusk's metaphor once again – "the gears of life [going] into the reverse" (Cusk 2013: 2)? Or, alternatively, can aftermath be seen as a new growth, a second crop of grass that can be sown and reaped ("the second mowing") and which gives rise to a new integrity, a new unity, to the "dark strings of creativity"? Should not the aftermath of the event also be recognised as the "*advent* […] of *future-to-come* […], of *adventure*, and of [new] *convention*" (Derrida 2007b: 6; emphasis in original)?

The present volume opens with five essays that are particularly concerned with the notion of trauma. Although the concept of aftermath does not function in the lexicon of Cathy Caruth, whose *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) is widely considered to be the foundational text of trauma theory, it can be inferred from her writing about the indirect and belated referentiality of trauma (1996). Trauma is, by definition an event so extreme that it cannot be registered by consciousness and therefore remains unassimilated, thus it cannot be remembered or forgotten. In consequence, trauma "is experienced only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it" (Caruth 1995: 4; emphasis in original). The subject "possessed" by trauma experiences psychological symptoms such as unbidden memories, flashbacks, hallucinations and nightmares – these are the immediate signs of the aftermath of trauma in an individual.

It is important to bear in mind the ambiguity inherent in the word "trauma" and how it is used in psychiatry, literary, and cultural studies. Namely, trauma denotes both an event so extreme that it leaves the individual, or community, psychologically wounded, and that psychological wound. It is the psychological wound that Susan Brison analyses in her astonishing autobiographical account of surviving a violent sexual attack entitled: *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self* (2002). The aftermath is directly related to the trauma of victims of sexual abuse, war veterans, and Holocaust survivors; the latter experience, especially the psychological and psychosomatic disorders of survivors, were analysed by Aaron Hass in his *The Aftermath: Living with the Holocaust* (1995). Caruth (1996) has recognised and acknowledged "the peculiar and perplexing experience of survival" (60), the complex emotional problems resulting from survivors' guilt and inability to reintegrate the sense of self shattered by the experience. As she

states "survival becomes for the human being, paradoxically, an endless testimony to the impossibility of living" (62). The question of survival and the impact of the Holocaust on the generation of the survivors' children acquired a new dimension when Marianne Hirsch coined the term "post-memory" in 1997 and Eva Hoffman soon followed with her book titled: *After Such Knowledge: A Meditation on the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (2005).

Another vital area of theoretical and critical debate is that of ethics of representation of trauma. Michael Rothberg (2000) has introduced the term "traumatic realism" for what he considers to be the appropriate and ethical mode of representation of the Holocaust and its aftermath. Anne Whitehead (2004) uses the label of "trauma fiction" to discern an emergent genre of fiction which borrows stylistic devices from the testimony of survivors and rather than represent trauma, communicates the experience through affect and emotion. Trauma fiction imitates the symptoms of trauma through discontinuity, fragmentation, repetition, and ellipsis in the text. Such non-realistic forms of representation are also advocated by the Australian art critic Jill Bennett (2005), who argues that realism does not suit the politics of testimony. Bennett recognises Dominick LaCapra's emphatic unsettlement as the most appropriate form of engagement with trauma, which she describes as "an experience of simultaneously *feeling* for another and becoming aware of a distinction between one's own perceptions and the experience of the other" (8; emphasis in the original).

Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman (2009) observe that trauma theory has given us "this unprecedented ability to talk about – and hence experience – the violence of the world" (276) and has changed our perspective of history. We have become aware of the potentially destructive legacy of historical traumas and increasingly realise that communities need to acknowledge and work through their painful historical experience (Vickroy 2002). Jeffrey Alexander in his *Cultural Sociology* defines cultural trauma and states that it "occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks on their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity" (Alexander 2005: 85). In Alexander's model, cultural trauma is socially constructed and it is a process in the course of which a new cultural narrative is negotiated; a successful narrative answers the questions about the nature of the pain, the nature of the victim and attribution of responsibility (2005). Thus cultural trauma is a collective working through of the painful experience, which results in constructing a new collective identity for the community, which, in turn, may be a source for resolving future problems or avoiding conflicts.

The fact that cultural trauma may lead to positive outcomes connects it with the second/alternative meaning of the aftermath which has been addressed in this volume. Indeed, psychiatrists have observed that traumatic events do not cause negative consequences only (Steuden and Janowski 2016), they refer to the positive changes induced by trauma as post-traumatic growth (PTG) and discern such changes in three areas of an individual's functioning: self-perception – when the person demonstrates greater resistance to difficult situations and greater confidence in their abilities; interpersonal relations – when the person experiences stronger bonds with others and greater openness to other people; philosophy of life – when the person experiences a growth of existential awareness and a change of life priorities (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004).

The first essay in this section offers a comparative analysis of English and French novels about the aftermath of World War I. Anna Branach-Kallas in "Discording After-Rites: Commemoration and Intimate Grief in British and French Fiction Published at the Great War's Centenary" examines practices of mourning and bereavement as a cultural phenomenon. The author discusses the effects of the cult of the dead on individuals and communities, and focuses on the tensions between collective and individual acts of remembrance. Her transnational perspective demonstrates a contrast between the approaches of the English and the French authors; while the former present the ritual of commemoration as cathartic and unifying for the community, the latter are more critical of the role of the state and its attempts at sanitising the war in public memory.

The theme of commemoration is continued in Dagmara Drewniak's "'It Is, After All, a Communication with Ghosts': *Correspondences* by Anne Michaels and Bernice Eisenstein as a Historical and Personal Elegy in the Aftermath of the Holocaust." The author discusses the personal and collective mourning in the generations affected by post-memory on the example of a unique volume, in which Michaels's poem and Eisenstein's illustrations commemorate simultaneously the writer's father, artists with a connection to the Holocaust, and countless nameless victims. As Drewniak observes, the circular form of the volume corresponds with its haunting content.

Edyta Lorek-Jezińska also writes about post-memory and commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust. In her essay titled: "Memory of the Holocaust: Vicarious Trauma and Counter-Monuments in *The Hideout* by NeTTheatre," the author examines a recent theatrical production which engages the audience affectively by simulating the experience of hiding and survival. Drawing on the theoretical reflections on cultural

trauma, vicarious trauma, and witnessing, Lorek-Jezińska offers her voice in the debate about the ethics of representation and the role of art in translating trauma.

Magdalena Zolkos's analysis of a recent South Korean novel in "'After You Died I Could Not Hold a Funeral, and So My Life Became a Funeral': Catastrophic Aftermath in Han Kang's *Human Acts*" illustrates the universal character of the impact which the aftermath of violence exerts on the community. Zolkos discusses Kang's novel as a fictional commemoration of the brutal suppression of civilian protests in South Korea in 1980. The author of the essay focuses on the novel's poetic and hauntological aspects which the novelist employs in order to show what happens with trauma, grief, and mourning in a community in which remembrance has been forbidden by the state.

The final text of this section moves to the theme of the aftermath of individual trauma. In "'Phantom Growth': Post-Traumatic Healing in Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time* (1987) and Julian Farino's T.V. Adaptation (2017)," Héloïse Lecomte presents a close reading of one of McEwan's early novels in which she points out how the novelist construes the traumatic shock through sound metaphors and how he saturates the text with the lexical field of loss. Lecomte demonstrates how McEwan's protagonists move from disorientation to acceptance and eventually post-traumatic growth.

The grouping of essays that comprise Part Two of the present volume concentrates on the question of *the end* – both collective and individual. The first two papers, that is, "After the Earth: New Postsingularity Scenarios" by Małgorzata Sugiera and "The End of the World and After" by Katarzyna Więckowska, share their interest in the literary responses to the Anthropocene, man-made ecological crisis, and the collapse of history(-ies). The former – in itself an ecocritical investigation of SF postsingularity scenarios – argues that the narratives in question do not only challenge the idea of linear time, and thus welcome an entanglement of different temporalities, but, most importantly, encourage one to re-conceptualise the very notion of apocalyptic catastrophe. Sugiera claims that despite prioritising (thematically and chronologically) the end of the world, the SF works do not necessarily hail the beginning of a new world and a new mankind. "Just the opposite," she concludes, "these novels show that we live already in an aftermath, caught in a loop of ceaseless repetitions of the same." In the same vein, Więckowska's argument also emphasises the relation between the apocalypse and the present. While investigating anthropogenic catastrophes and their aftermath in, among others,

David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) and Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007), Więckowska shows that the end of the world, though inevitable and unexpected, can also appear uncannily familiar, "as if it were a mere repetition of something that has already taken place."

Unlike their immediate predecessors, the remaining two essays of Part Two, namely, "Life, End of: Secular Eschatology in Christine Brooke-Rose's *Out* and Anna Kavan's *Ice*" by Krystian Piotrowski and "After Naming: Rilke's *Namenlos*, Kant, and the Subject of Aesthetics" by Mantra Mukim, are concerned not so much with the end of days as with death itself and with the state that arrives after it – in other words, with mourning. While Piotrowski explores the eschatological contexts of two "end-of-life"/apocalyptic novels – Christine Brooke-Rose's 1964 *Out* and Anna Kavan's 1967 *Ice* – from postmodern/poststructuralist perspective, Mukim employs Immanuel Kant's aesthetics to discuss Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies* and *Sonnets to Orpheus* – all in order to investigate the grieving subject incapable of using language to name anything, let alone naming the self.

The five essays in Part Three, entitled "After Images," share their interest in both visual studies and mechanisms of contemporary art world. Douglas Klahr in his article entitled "The Precursor to Virtual Reality Documents Architectural Hell: A Stereoscopic View of the Crematorium at Dachau" problematises one particular photographic piece of evidence of the Genocide, preserved in a stereoscopic image of the Dachau crematorium's interior taken just after World War II in 1945. Taking into consideration both cultural (aesthetic) and ethical involvements of the medium of stereoscopic photography documenting sites of the Holocaust, the author considers how stroboscopic viewing experience engages profound issues of traumatic after-images about voyeurism, simulacra, authenticity, viewership, and remembrance.

Grace Pundyk also deals with originally traumatic events and how they are transcended via both textual and visual evidence, such as letters and photographs. Her article entitled "The Promise of a Hospitable Memory: Encounters on the Threshold" fuses academic paper and (auto)biographical case study in which the author's grandmother's history takes pride of place. Pundyk's Polish grandmother, who was deported to and died in Siberia under the Stalinist regime in the 1940s, becomes a point of departure for the author for whom the unknown grandmother herself and her personal history are accessible by photographs that have survived, among them, a passport-size photo, a group photo of deportees in Siberia, a studio photograph of her as a young woman, and a mourning photograph – a post-death image, with a body in a coffin, surrounded by

mourners. Using Jacques Derrida's hauntological category of *arrivant* Pundyk examines and explores traumatic inheritance on the one hand, and intergenerational witnessing on the other.

In her paper "'We Have Decided Not to Decide': The End of History and the Punk Politics of De Reagering" Amanda Wasielewski describes how the poet Mike von Bibikov led a performance-art-*cum*-political-party, launched from the squatter and punk scene of the city of Amsterdam, De Reagering, whose name is a pun combination of the Dutch words for government (*regering*) and to react (*reageren)*. Although the history of this performance and a kind of social activism which took place in the 1970s and 1980s is an important part of the paper, Wasilewski's essay is by no means limited to the historical overview only. What remains crucial here is the aftermath of the 1980s punk art scene performative activities. The author traces this legacy by analysing the public discourses of the 1990s and those which arose at the beginning of the new century, concluding that what was ironic and satirising forty years ago, contained "the seeds of the morally ambivalent and relativist positions that define the political landscape today"; and as such "De Reagering straddled the line between leftwing and rightwing tactics and attitudes."

"After Nature: Landscape, Art, and Design in the Aftermath of Katrina and Sandy" by Karolina Kolenda considers the aftermath of 2005 Hurricane Katrina and 2012 Hurricane Sandy and its impact on the institutionalised American art world in New Orleans and New York City. The aftermath of Katrina and Sandy has been characterised by a fierce and wide discussions about how the art world at large and landscape artists and designers in particular should approach the task of rebuilding and regeneration. The author takes into consideration such issues as visual practice *vis-à-vis* climate change and so-called green gentrification, examining several initiatives undertaken by art institutions along with landscape and architecture design projects so as to address ethical and aesthetic aspects of how contemporary cities engage with landscape.

Finally, Glenn Loughran in his article entitled "Evental Research… After the Future of Work" explores the role of artistic research through the concept of the "event." Beginning with the ambivalent – traumatic and regenerating or disastrous and renewing – understanding of the notion of "event" itself, the author argues for an evental conception of artistic research that is able to cultivate the significance and meaningfulness of events understood as: catalysators or "generators of innovation, critique, and collective meaning making." Loughran's case study is a long-term artistic research project entitled *After the Future of Work (2017–2019)*,

which was set up to engage local communities on the future of work after the 2008 financial crisis and economic recession. As he admits: "By identifying and working through a deeper understanding of the relationship between risk, significance and subjectivity, these practices support an affirmative orientation towards the event, one which produces new collective subjectivities through the exploration of 'events *qua* events.'"

Although over the last few decades a number of fields have manifested considerable interest in the consequence/after-effect of seminal event(s), the postcolonial studies have been consistently preoccupied with the notion of aftermath from their very beginnings (e.g., Bhabha 1994; Dauner and Foo 2009; Hiddleston 2017). The three essays that comprise Part Four of the present volume – their wide-ranging thematic scope in particular – might be seen as an overt manifestation of this concern.

In "Colonialism and Its Aftermath in *The Lord of the Rings*: Postcolonial Reflections on Tolkien's Imperial Fantasy," Claudia Marquis offers a fascinating reading of *The Lord of the Rings* in which she probes the "applicability" of events in Tolkien's fantasy novel to real world events – in particular the book's proximity to the historical experience of Tolkien's English generation with respect to the loss of empire that coincided with the end of World War II. Marquis's close study of the character of Tolkien's fantasy (alongside intellectual and material history) unveils "the insistently political desires of the indigene and the colonised for assured, habitable spaces in a world constantly subject to imperialism" right at the very heart of the writer's masterpiece.

The theoretical premise behind Paulina Grzęda's "The Entangled Temporality of the Postcolony: Zakes Mda and the 'Chaffing Temporalities' of Post-Apartheid" is Derek Hook's conceptualisation of "chaffing temporalities" of the post-apartheid predicament, where the past, the present, and the future are thrust into overlapping propinquity – which originates in his understanding of post-apartheid South Africa as a country of unsynchronised and split temporalities. This theorisation is subsequently used to analyse Zakes Mda's post-apartheid novelistic output – particularly *Ways of Dying* (1995) and *The Heart of Redness* (2000), and these particular texts' engagement with the notion of time via their adoption of a non-linear, cyclical or spiral, yet always open-ended mode of narration. Grzęda argues that the ethics of entangled temporality explored by Mda, should be ultimately seen as "harbouring future perspectives of critical importance not only for the socio-political discourse on South Africa, or the African postcolony, but for the totality of the global polity."

Part Four concludes with the joint piece by María Concepción Brito Vera and María Luz González Rodríguez entitled "Life Out of Balance and Its Aftermath. Paradoxes in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*: A Material Ecocritical Reading." This essay – which shares a number of affinities with other contributions to the volume, particularly the ones by Małgorzata Sugiera and Katarzyna Więckowska – offers another attempt at ecocritical reading of contemporary fiction, this time the 2017 novel by the celebrated Indian author Arundhati Roy. The essay argues that Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* deliberately annuls the boundaries that separate the natural from the cultural, the human from the non-human, proving that human activity provokes innumerable and irremediable porous consequences in a kind of unstoppable butterfly effect. Both authors also insist on Roy's dedication to make society – via her fiction – aware of the corrosive ins and outs of current global economic, social, political, and ecological systems – in themselves the problematic legacy of colonialism.

Finally, Part Five of this book entitled "'(Un)Catastrophic' Aftermaths" contains five essays dealing with traumatic events ranging from an ecological disaster to the "death of the novel." Marie-Anne Hansen-Pauly in her essay "Language and Disaster: 'The Gulf (Between You and Me)' by Pierre Joris" presents the avant-garde triptych of poems written in the aftermath of a catastrophic explosion and ensuing ecological disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. The author argues that Joris's "nomad poetics" questions the position of humans in their natural, social, and cultural environment and shows how his poems "testify for those who can no longer bear witness to the horrors they have experienced."

Barbara Klonowska in "The Aftermath of Love: Michael Haneke's *Amour*" has chosen to interpret the film in the light of Giorgio Agamben's concept of love seen as a "ceaseless and disinterested act of respect towards the Other and his/her singularity." Klonowska's detailed analysis points out how Haneke subverts the convention of melodrama by focusing on love in the old age.

A different kind of catastrophe lies in the centre of the text discussed by Christina Schönberger-Stepien in her essay "Rushdie's Rebellious *Joseph Anton*: Chronicling the Aftermath of *The Satanic Verses*." Schönberger-Stepien argues convincingly that Rushdie's 2012 memoir is a literary re-visitation of the *fatwa* years and "an attempt to reconsider the events as a catalyst for change and transformation." What is more, the death threat and its aftermath was transformative not only for the writer but for the whole literary community.

Michaela Beck reads the alleged "death of the novel" as a traumatic event. In "The Post-Postmodern Afterlife of the American Novel: 'Resurrecting' the Novel-as-Archive in Anne Valente's *Our Hearts Will Burn Us Down* (2016) and Ed Park's *Personal Days* (2008)," Beck discusses the two novels as instances of American post-postmodernism which she identifies as an attempt to release the novel from "the postmodern dead end."

Finally, Tomasz Fisiak's "Grande Dame Guignol and the Notion of the Aftermath: A Case Study of Robert Aldrich's *Hush…Hush, Sweet Charlotte* (1964)" presents a detailed analysis of Aldrich's "hag horror" film as a narrative of a traumatic aftermath.

Having offered a brief overview of the book's contents, we should also necessarily express our profound gratitude and debt to Professor Marzena Kubisz, Professor Marzena Sokołowska-Paryż, and Professor Marcin Lachowski – our most insightful reviewers who have greatly contributed to the final shape this volume has taken, which, we kindly hope, will inspire further reflection and broaden the scope of future discussions on its subject matter.

We should like to conclude this introductory article by returning – once again – to Rachel Cusk whose book has played such an important role in encouraging us to address the notion of aftermath. At one point, Cusk ponders over what happens to the form in which one's life has so far been narrated when the "form" of this very life becomes shattered – the question central to the liminal position her memoir, quite unwillingly, occupies. She notes:

> Form is both safety and imprisonment, both protector and dissembler: form, in the end, conceals truth, just as the body conceals the cancer that will destroy it. Form is rigid, inviolable, devastatingly correct; that is its vulnerability. Form can be broken. It will tolerate variation but not transgression; it can be broken, but at what cost? If it is destroyed what can be out in its place? (Cusk 2013: 55)

Elsewhere she also observed the following: "Without wishing to sound melodramatic, it was creative death after *Aftermath*. That was the end. I was heading into total silence – an interesting place to find yourself when you are quite developed as an artist" ([in:] Kellaway 2014). "My mode of autobiography had come to an end," she further added (ibid.).

Writing these words in 2019, seven years after the publication of *Aftermath*, one can safely state that what came "out in its [*Aftermath*'s] place"[1]

[1] Given the auto/biographical nature of her writing, one may also wonder about Cusk's personal life and the aftermath of her marriage to Adrian Clarke (and their subsequent

was, indeed, quite fortuitous. Instead of embracing silence, Cusk committed herself to a new literary project which resulted in the publication of her critically acclaimed (and commercially successful) autofictional trilogy comprising *Outline* (2014), *Transit* (2016), and *Kudos* (2018) – the high point of her literary career so far. Her post-*Aftermath* trilogy is, indeed, an act of second mowing, and, as such, a testament to the fact that new grass may yet grow again.

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separation). "Out in its [i.e., Cusk's former marriage] place" is Cusk's new relationship: she is currently married to Siemon Scammell-Katz (Thurman 2017).

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